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Soviets advancing with the SSX-24

By Jeremiah O'Leary
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MADRID, Spain — President Reagan's top national security official yesterday described as "intolerable" efforts by the Soviet Union to develop and deploy a new, mobile, multiple-warhead strategic missile, the SSX-24.

National security adviser Robert McFarlane said the missile, capable of carrying 10 nuclear warheads, would give the Soviet Union a first-strike capability and would make the United States "vulnerable to coercion and blackmail."

President Reagan is expected to declare today in a speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, that the Soviets are moving toward deployment of the new intercontinental nuclear missile, a step that would undermine the stability of mutual deterrence.

President Reagan is not expected to identify the missile as the SSX-24, but Mr. McFarlane did yesterday in a briefing on the presidential speech.

Mr. McFarlane said the SSX-24 has a first-strike capability because it is mobile and is potentially able to avoid detection, monitoring or arms-control verification.

United States officials said the SSX-24 is not yet in production but is known to have flown successful flight tests.

President Reagan, in a major speech that was originally intended to stress European unity on the 40th anniversary of V-E Day, intends to stress that in the short run the United States has no alternative but to compete with the Soviets in missiles, not to achieve superiority but to attain balance. The president will put the case for three possible responses to the new Soviet weapon:

- A continued push at Geneva for verifiable arms reductions even though until now nothing new has been heard from the Soviet negotiators.

- Stepped-up modernization by the Western allies to stay even with the constantly accelerating Soviet deployments, despite the risk that this would lead to a less stable balance than what exists today.

- The development of non-nuclear defenses through the Strategic

Defense Initiative or "star wars" system to offset the Soviet buildup of offensive weapons.

Mr. McFarlane said the Strasbourg speech is a major address in which President Reagan will present a framework for the conduct of U.S.-Soviet relations in the late 20th century.

The president will set forth proposals for improved confidence-building measures between the superpowers, including direct military hot-lines to be used in periods of tension, such as the downing of the KAL airliner, the murder of Major Alfred Nicholson or during military maneuvers and naval exercises.

The national security adviser said the Soviets have shown they are not interested in parity, as evidenced by their conduct in the 1970s when parity was achieved and then they surpassed the United States.

"The effect was to make the Soviets much more willing to take risks in places like Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Indochina, Nicaragua and the direct use of Soviet power in Afghanistan," Mr. McFarlane declared.

He said President Reagan will say in Strasbourg, "We cannot and should not seek to build our peace and freedom perpetually on the basis of expanding nuclear arsenals. It is essential that the United States maintain a modern and survivable nuclear capability in each leg of the strategic triad, sea, land and air-based."

"If the United States faces possible deployment of MIRV-ed (multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle) systems which can move about and avoid detection, one can imagine the time in which the president would be faced during a crisis with not knowing how many or the location of Soviet strategic power," Mr. McFarlane said.

"This is an intolerable condition which presents the Soviet Union with an apparent first-strike capability," he warned.

That, he said, would make America vulnerable to coercion and nuclear blackmail.

Mr. McFarlane said the SSX-24 is a system not yet deployed but undergoing tests and, as a mobile weapon, it appears likely to complicate problems of deterrence and arms control. He said the new missile is fundamentally destabilizing because the new U.S. Midgetman is a single-warhead missile.

A single-warhead system in the Soviet Union with an arsenal of 1,000 tubes, he said, could not cover the entire United States target base, but the SSX-24 with 10 warheads and a 10,000-mile range could cover the whole United States in a first strike and have a considerable reserve afterwards.

The national security adviser said the United States will have by the year 1990 the new D-5 MIRV-ed missile with prompt hard-target capability for deployment on Trident submarines. He acknowledged the D-5 would also be mobile, concealed and with multiple warheads.

"But none of us ever pretend that you would ever get the alert rates and level of warheads on station to give an equivalent capability that would match a similar number of systems on land," he said.

He said the president's speech in France is a communication to the new Soviet leadership in case they are in any doubt about the commitment of the United States.

Mr. McFarlane said deployment dates on the SSX-24 is intelligence information but that it is in an advanced state of testing and deployment can be expected in the not-too-distant future.